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ABSTRACT

Literature that speculates about the future omits African-Americans. Racism and unemployment have caused this group to swell the ranks of the underclass. Thus, as a group, blacks have been written off as obsolete and useless. Most at risk for joining the underclass is the black male. Because of the way Western males are socialized to be strong and macho, and because of discrimination which does not allow black males to achieve the preferred male image, black men are dehumanized. An orderly process of socializing black youth is needed. They must be prepared for adulthood in a way that increases their self-esteem. The model for their training must be an Afrocentric one in which the elders of the community teach the youth to become responsible adults, and in which social institutions provide life sustaining support. The rite of passage known as Simba Wachanga is an appropriate model. (Author/VM)

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COMING OF AGE FOR THE 21st CENTURY

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Adults are not born, but made.

The year 2000 A.D. is thirteen years away. Based on current trends what does the 21st century look like for African Americans? What segments of our population are the most vulnerable? And what must we do as a community to prepare and nurture a generation that is equipped with the necessary physical, mental and spiritual wherewithal for survival and success as whole people?

The larger picture projects a culture self-destructing by the year 2000 A.D. The footnotes of a culture at risk are evidenced by a fractured population--unwed mothers, unemployed men, uncontrolled youth, immorality has become the desired image, drugs and alcohol have become the accepted balm and tragedy has become commonplace.

Megatrends and Third Wave are two popular books that speculate about the future. The hyperspace shift from an industrial to post industrial society has significant implications for African-Americans. The future, as described by James Naisbett and Alvin Tofler, does not include African-Americans.

Sidney Willhelm and Samuel Yette in their prophetic early 1970's publication of Who Needs The Negro? and The Choice: The Issue of Black Survival in America were not presenting a paranoid analysis of the past and present with future implications. The question of African-America's survival was the issue. The escalation of the conditions they evidenced warrants the need today for a national state of emergency in Black America. The declaration of such a state was echoed recently by Journalist and Historian, Lerone Bennett, Jr.; speaking before child advocates at The Fourteenth Annual Conference of The Black Child Development Institute, he stated, "That we are living in the most dangerous period since slavery."

The evolution of unemployment and racism with the assistance of technology has created a permanent underclass. African-Americans as a population, swell the ranks of the underclass. The underclass represents a segment of the population that has been written off as obsolete and useless. Unemployment, as documented in The Choice and Who Needs The Negro? is not a new experience for African-Americans; but what is new, is the nature of the unemployment. In terms of automation, joblessness loses the peculiar quality of being a mere

transitory moment that will fade upon the resumption of economic prosperity. The new technology informs African-Americans of permanent, workless years even as the economy establishes new productive records and profits. Our fate is no longer tied into an economy in high gear; displacement rather than unemployment spells the difference. Both poverty and joblessness exist, not outside the economic system as aberrations that come and go when recessions and depressions come and go, but instead, as fundamental aspects of an ongoing economic order designed to maximize investment returns from the new technology.

A man's worth in America has been based on his ability to provide. Black Americans have outlived their usefulness. Our raison d'etre to this society has ceased to be a compelling issue. Once an economic asset, we are now considered an economic drag. The wood is all hewn, the water all drawn, the cotton all picked, and the rails reach from coast to coast. The ditches are all dug, the dishes are put away, and only a few shoes remain to be shined. Thanks to old Blacks and newfangled machines, the sweat chores of the nation are done. Now we face a society that is brutally pragmatic, technologically accomplished, deeply racist and surly. In such a society, the absence of social and economic value is a crucial factor in anyone's fight for a future. We have gained in education and political representation, but not in employment or income and the poverty gap persists.

The quantitative increases in Black elected officials have not reflected qualitative changes for the masses. Socio-economic conditions and quality of life for the masses have worsened.As evidenced by two studies--Cleveland: The Evolution of Black Political Power, William Nelson, Jr., Ohio State University, 1986; and Blacks and The Legacy of The Great Society: The Economic and Political Impact of Federal Social Policy, Brown and Erie, Harvard College, 1981--while Black elected officials have been modestly successful in increasing access to public resources by members of the Black middle-class, they have been unsuccessful in significantly altering the social and economic position of the Black community. Unemployment and poverty in Black mayoral cities remain among the highest in the nation. Black governance of major American cities has not only failed to stem the tide of urban decay, but has precipitated policies of central city disinvestment by states and the Federal Government, as well as private corporate interests.The economic and political status of the African-American community is predicated on the precarious foothold of the existing social welfare economy.

New family styles, changed ways of working, loving and living; a new economy with new political conflicts will reflect the following effects:

Decrease in overall employment.
Increase in Black female employment.

Decrease in Black male employment.
Increase in mothers with jobs.
Increase in divorce.
Increase in single-parent homes.
Increase in teenage pregnancies.
Increase in homosexuality.
Increase in homicides and suicides.
Increase in inter-racial marriages.
Decrease in Black colleges and universities.
Increase in child abuse.
Increase in disruptive male behavior and disproportionate representation in suspensions, expulsions, push-outs, drop-outs, lower tracks and special programs.
Increase in Black male prison population.
Decrease in male high school graduates and higher education graduates.

The African-American male is at risk! An assortment of conditions indicate that the Black male is definitely threatened and endangered. Our endangerment is related to exposure to unfavorable social and environmental conditions. When social indicators and statistics are examined, African-American men are found to be on the negative side in regard to income, education, health, employment and so forth. Studying the data makes it clear that African-American men are not like European men and that race is still an important variable for understanding the role of Afrocan-American men in society. The results of such inequities have crippling consequences on African-American families and communities as well as for the society at large.

Males, in general, are at risk. We are at risk because of the western male seasoning process. The process is related to machoism and a privileged sex image. American men are raised by parent(s), conditioned by society and often encouraged by women to play a role of lover-husband-parent-breadwinner-strong-and-silent man. These impossible demands psychologically cripple and eventually physically kill men.

What is a man? Goldberg in his book Hazards of Being Male, comments:

> An independent strong achiever who can be counted on to be always in control. His success in the working world is predicated on the repression of self and display of a controlled, deliberate, calculated, manipulative responsiveness. The man who feels, becomes inefficient because he gets emotionally involved and this inevitably slows him down and distracts him. His more de-humanized competition will then surely pass him by.

Male seasoning thus becomes a de-humanization process of

indoctrinating you against yourself; a conspiracy designed to make you a skeleton, with no feelings and compassion for your children, women or brothers.

Internalization of values and images that have been externally defined has resulted in our dilemma. The dilemma reflects a lack of connectiveness and functioning as whole people.

As stated by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, 1931:

> "When you determine what a man shall think, you do not have to concern yourself with what he will do. If you make a man feel inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door--he will go without being told, and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one."

Our behavior and actions in 1987 does not reflect the behavior and actions of our ancestors. We have gone astray and lost the way. The dreams of Dr. King and Malcolm have been betrayed by fast-talking boys masquerading as men. The heroes and warriors of the past have been replaced by bomb dropping and cheese stealing Mayors. Where have all the heroes gone and where are the Black men?

If Sister Harriet Tubman was to return today, how many of us would steal away with her? Integration has resulted in assimilation. Assimilation at the expense of our wholeness, sanity and children. Nowadays, with the exception of Jesse Jackson and Minister Louis Farrakhan, Black male leadership, like Margaret Mitchell's sage of the old South, seems to have "Gone With The Wind." Where do we go from here? What is necessary to create a socially supportive environment to nurture that much needed generation of African-American men?

Psychohistorical data support the contention that racial pride is an effective means for regulating intra-group tensions. In the absence of an Afro-Centric orientation that promotes community power and self-determination, the need for self-reliance is eroded by value illnesses.

The mid-1970's is to be remembered as the time when young African-American men killed each other at a rate unknown anywhere else in the world. As a matter of fact, in one year alone, the Black-on-Black homicide rate was greater than the incidence of death in the entire nine years of the Viet Nam war. This era was also the time of the murder of Afro-American boys in Atlanta. During this time, the child most likely to be suspended and expelled from school was the Black male child. This was the time, too, when the student least

preferred by all teachers was the African-American male student.

The value orientation of the Black Movement supplied the pride used to obtain academic success, to reduce juvenile delinquency, and to help African-Americans to structure their lives for personal satisfactions. Blackness has always been about personal power and social control, but society, does not allow much access to either for African-Americans. As a consequence, stress from racism is severe, asymptomatic, and multifaceted. The best antidote to Black homicidal violence, teenage, pregnancy, suicide, substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, etc., comes from a pro-social effort based upon a self-image that gives a feeling of positive accomplishment and appreciation. Afro-Centric pride promotes or enhances pro-social behavior.

Black power (ethnic pride) became a concept that captured the aspirations of the masses in issues related to community power and self-determination. This outpour of racial pride had not been seen since the days of The Garvey Movement. These developments promoted a rich variety of ethnic thematic expressions in music, literature, theater, social sciences, symbols, and rituals. The closest contemporary parallel to The Garvey Movement was the Honorable Elijah Mohammed. Both are under-researched models that were successful in unifying large numbers of Black people.

When we can produce individuals emancipated from fears about themselves, we will produce individuals freed to feel with others and freed from shackles of the old orders--freed to conceive new orders and vigorous in the struggle to create them.

The weakest link in any chain, is in the beginning. The chain-of-pain can be arrested by producing individuals who feel good about themselves. Planting a harvest to break the chain-of-pain and emancipate individuals from fears about themselves must take place through regaining control over the processes of socialization. The socialization process must consist of an orderly process of maturation that prepares youth for adulthood as men and women.

As referred to by Useni Eugene Perkins, Harvesting New Generations The Positive Development of Black Youth, 1985, the original harvest of African youth was contaminated by the socialization/westernization of the slave youth process and the Negro/Black youth process. What is needed is a new harvest that reflects the African-American youth.

Negro/Black Youth	African-American Youth
Confused self-concept	African self-concept
Cultural incompetence	Cultural competence

Ambivalent behavior	High self-esteem
Depreciated character	Positive behavior
Adaptive behavior	Transcendental character
Confused group loyalty	Self awareness
Median/low self-esteem	Liberated behavior
Reactionary behavior	Group loyalty

What is needed to get us as a people into the twenty-first century can only come through a process which is part of our heritage that has been lost, but must be restored--Rites of Passage. Manhood training or Rites of Passage was considered to be the most important period in a youth's life, and every boy and girl was expected to go through it if they were to achieve manhood and womanhood.

What has been lacking in the socialization of Black youth in America, has been the presence of an orderly process of maturation to prepare them for adulthood. Institutions have failed to fill the void. Institutions are ineffective because of their own lack of preparation and commitment to respond to the needs of Black youth. As a result of this vacuum, most Black youth become indoctrinated by the streets, peers and media; the over-glamorization of popular culture; and the racist propaganda that underlie American society. It is little wonder that Black youth have become confused, embittered, demoralized and walking time bombs. If we are to promote the positive development of Black youth, particularly males, we must have a model that expressively addresses itself to their exceptional needs. The model must penetrate the racist norms which permeate this society so Black youth will have the opportunity to maximize their development inspite of its adverse and debilitating influence. The model must engender values and attitudes which eradicate self-defeating behavior and replace them with liberating behavior. In developing a model that epitomizes these qualities, one is used that exemplifies the principles of Afrocentricity. A model based on Afrocentricity provides us with the properties that best characterize the traditions and values needed to enhance the socialization of Black youth.

In the development of an Afrocentric model, I am not making a claim that it is a replica of traditional African cultures. Such a claim would be irrational and ignores the influence of the highly technological society in which we live. However, some of the principles that underlie traditional African societies have been applied to the model.

1. Community elders have a responsibility for helping to train youth to become responsible adults.
2. Youth cannot sufficiently teach themselves to become responsible adults.
3. The socialization of youth must be channeled through institutions that provide them with critical life-sustaining support systems.

4. When the above three principles do not occur, we should not expect our youth to be totally responsible for their actions which are counter-productive to the welfare of the community.

In October, 1984, a Rites of Passage process entitled Simba Wachanga was implemented at The East End Neighborhood House in Cleveland, Ohio. Simba Wachanga is Kiswahili for young lions. The program for male adolescent functions as a guidance system through which African-America speaks to its young males telling them--

> Who they are!
> Where they should be going!
> What they need to do to get there!
> What they must have when they arrive!

The program focus at this time, being male in no way minimizes the importance of the need for similar rituals for females. It is, however, an acknowledgement that if America is successful in removing the Black male from its social, political, economic, and spiritual fabric, it simultaneously assures the demise of Black females as well. I am, thus of the opinion that to save the Black male is to save the Black Race.

The foundation of The Simba Rites of Passage Program is predicated on the Nguzo Saba or Seven Principles. Principles are important because without them, practice would be incorrect and suffer, and possibilities will be limited. Principles are categories of commitment and priorities which define human possibilities and a value system. The premise of the Nguzo Saba is based on Dr. Ron Karenga's Kawaida Theory which maintains, "That if the key crisis in Black life is the cultural crisis, i.e., a crisis in views and values, then social organization or rather reorganization must start with a new value system." The Nguzo Saba are the moral minimum value system Black people need in order to rescue and reconstruct their history and humanity, indeed their daily lives, in their own image and interests.

Nguzo Saba

Unity	Cooperative Economics
Self Determination	Purpose
Collective Work and Responsibility	Creativity
	Faith

The environment for Simba is social supportive and transcends nuclear, extended and single family structures. Such family forms in contemporary America are incapable of developing male youth. The objectives of Simba are as follows:

Legitimization of beingness as a male

Provision of a Family Code
    Being able to interpret, manage, and respond to both known and undefined situations
Elasticity of boundaries
    Developing rules of conduct
Mediation of concrete conditions
    Problem-solving and decision-making

The Simba Program involves a minimum of one year to a maximum of three years of participation. The years of participation correspond to the accomplishment of three skill levels. The skill levels are reflected by the colors of red, green and black. The progression from lowest red to highest black is symbolic of the colors of the African-American Nation flag. The African-American Nation flag was provided by The Honorable Marcus Garvey.

Simba, as a Rites of Passage process, involves levels of proficiency that relate to the following:

Skills that must be developed
Services that must be rendered
Things that must be experienced
Behavior that must be modeled
Information that must be learned

The skill or curriculum development areas for Simba are as follows:

History and Culture
Life Skills
    Manhood Training
    Sex Education
    Physical Fitness and Self-Defense
    Survival Training
    Health Maintenance and Hygiene
    Life Management and Value Clarification
    Political Awareness
    Educational Reinforcement
    Financial Management and Entrepreneurial Skills
    Spiritual Enrichment
        Universe is based on moral principles (not to conflict with their religious preference)

Simba Cleveland is a full year program that parallels the school year with a minimum of four hours per week or maximum of five hours per week of activities. During the summer, special activities and field trips are scheduled. An inter-disciplinary approach is used. Activities are no longer than one hour with no more than two scheduled back-to-back on weekends or after school on weekdays.

Staffing of Simba projects should include a coordinator and a Council of Elders who will assume the roles of instructors

and Big Brothers. The Council of Elders should be recruited from within the sponsoring organization. They MUST be positive male role models who have the necessary skills to function in the various roles; and also have a sense of their African identity or a willingness to learn and teach from an Afrc-Centric perspective. An orientation should be provided for The Elders. The orientation should include project rationale/philosophy, goals, objectives, methodology, roles, responsibilities and expectations.

The most challenging task related to implementing a Simba project is identifying a sponsoring organization and the recruitment of a Council of Elders who have the time, skills, commitment, interest, creativity, patience, and capacities to care and share. A coordinator or chief should be selected from the group and assigned the organization responsibility.

The ideal sponsors of Simba programs are churches, Greeks, Masons, professional organizations, and neighborhood/community Associations. The Simba process can be adapted and used in school settings, with Cub and Boy Scouts, group homes, boys clubs, etc. It can be used with younger children and older youth. Creativity and flexibility in utilizing the model is urged. What is crucial in implementing a Simba model in any form or fashion, is an understanding and knowledge of Afrocentricity. To insure that all Elders and interested persons have this knowledge, they should be required to read the following books:

* Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change by Molefi Kete Asante
* Miseducation of The Negro by Carter G. Woodson
* Destruction of Black Civilization by Chancellor Williams
* Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles by Janice E. Hale
* Countering The Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys, Volumes I and II by Jawanza Kunjufu
* Harvesting New Generations: The Positive Development of Black Youth by Useni Eugene Perkins
* Bringing The Black Boy to Manhood: The Passage by Nathan and Julia Hare

Specific activities that youth participants should complete before completion of the first level or year are as follows:

The Log
: A record should be kept by the boy and periodically checked by the parent(s), coordinator and Elders (Should include pictures, clippings, notations, articles and other materials pertaining to his transition.)

An understanding of immediate and extended family
: A full list is made of relationships and

whereabouts of each relative, beginning with immediate family. This project begins with immediate family and goes back as far as possible.

Service to neighborhood and community

Recognition of participants when they complete a Life Skill area and progress from level to level is essential during the process-certification and ceremony.

Parental involvement with The Simba: Rites of Passage project is important. The program is not intended to function as a baby-sitting service. Parent(s) and youth responsibilities should be reflected in an agreement that is reviewed, discussed and approved by parent(s) and participant(s). Role definition vis-a-vis responsibilities and expectations is crucial for participation. Understanding and reinforcement of the process by the parent(s) is also crucial.

The experience for the participants should be one of work and fun. It should be challenging and stimulating. It is important to create an environment that is sensitive to pre-adolescent males. We do not want to replicate the institutions and environments of miseducation. The Simba: Rites of Passage process is a pro-active response to the question of where are the Black men? It will provide a harvest of men that will function as that much needed generation of providers, mates and warriors.

Presently, there is one Simba program in Ohio (2749 Woodhill Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44104). Simba, Incorporated, the parent organization, is located at 12921 Euclid Avenue, East Cleveland, Ohio 44112. Simba, Inc. is available to provide orientations and workshops. For additional information, contact Paul Hill, Jr., (216) 791-9378.